Pam
Missy pers.

1726

MENTAL HYGIENE FOR MISSIONARIES

By Eleanor Hope Johnson, Ph.D.

MISSIONARY RESEARCH LIBRARY

The Need for a Knowledge of the Principles of Mental Hygiene

For many reasons the work of the missionary makes more demands on him as a person than other forms of religious service seem to do. The most obvious reason is that the missionary is required to leave his own cultural environment and work against the background of a totally different set of customs and ideals. Then again, he or she may be called upon to work and teach among a people whose desire for self-government is rapidly growing and who are unwilling to accept the leadership, but only the cooperation, of workers from another and more dominant civilization. This is a situation which may be inconsistent with the training many missionaries have received. Both reasons require a self-control and self-direction adequate to the situation and above that needed in religious work at home. It is the aim of mental hygiene to describe and foster qualities of personality which shall make such self-control possible. For this reason an article on Mental Hygiene for Missionaries is offered in the hope that it may suggest needs and ways of meeting such needs for the religious workers from whom so much is expected.

It has been increasingly emphasized during the last decade or two that a high degree of intelligence, even integrity of character, does not alone determine the efficiency with which a person carries on his vocation, especially where that vocation is concerned primarily with human relationships. There is a third factor which merits more attention than it has received in the past, than it receives even now in some quarters, namely a balanced personality. This characteristic of an individual has been called by many names: integration of personality, inner harmony, good adjustment to environment, power to think objectively, emotional maturity. Many books have been and are being written on how to acquire this type of personality. It seems to be a certain relationship of many traits, a direction of character. John Dewey has said (Human Nature and Conduct) that character is made up of interrelated and mutually influencing factors, the product rather than the sum of its parts. Lack of firmness or integration of character often prevents the full use of a high intelligence or a sincere concern for religion because of emotional blockings which get in the way of carrying out our best judgments or our desire to obey what we feel is God's will for us. Childish fears can do this, as also can over-emphasized emotional ties, and desires not understood or not faced honestly. A list of books is appended which discuss helpfully and much more in detail the development of an integrated personality. Often, however, there is need for guidance in interpreting even the simplest statement regarding personality problems or in putting into practice suggestions contained in such books.

Because of the striking number of casualties in the mission field which seem to be the result of the sort of disharmony referred to above, the writer has tried to apply some general maxims of mental hygiene to needs specific to the missionary situation. Just as we accept, sometimes too easily, maxims for Christian behavior without considering their application to ordinary daily conduct; just as we go to church and pray - "Forgive us

our debts"- and then almost immediately fail to forgive someone who has injured our pet vanity, so we glibly repeat warnings against conflicts, self-pity or inferiority feelings and never learn to apply them in our own human relationships. The following pages, therefore, are written in the hope that they may be of use in actual situations; they were written primarily with the missionary candidate in mind; they may however be of help to returned missionaries and to personnel secretaries.

Some of the statements in this paper are answers to questions which have been raised by both theological students and missionaries in various seminars on mental hygiene conducted by the writer. Also, an effort has been made to relate to the special needs of foreign missionaries suggestions by various authors for "solving personal problems". The writer speaks from experience with many distressed personalities and from insight gained by listening to descriptions of problems as they occur in this field. Perhaps it is fair to say that problems are the same everywhere; differences among them are due to the particular environment in which the difficulty arises, and, of course, to the general make-up of the human being involved. No two situations are ever alike. Because the analysis of causes and suggestions for dealing with the problem are successful in one case it does not follow that they will be in another, no matter how similar the two situations may appear to be. It is often necessary to dig deep for actual causes when on the surface some causal factors seem obvious. The obvious is not to be trusted. Too often "things are not what they seem".

Hazards Encountered by the Missionary

There are two classes of hazards to a successful missionary experience which will be described briefly; the first rises from the environment, both before leaving home and one's chosen church and after reaching an unfamiliar world of scenes and people; the other is connected with certain personality problems.

Environmental Hazards

Type of welcome on the field - The question might be raised as to how helpful a preparation for work in a remote mission field is the sort of enthusiastic praise often received by the young missionary before he or she sets forth on this journey into the unknown. Even a well-explored field is unknown to the newcomer, for other personalities enter into the environmental picture and it is always a question whether the youngest or most recently arrived member of a local mission group will find congeniality and a helpful welcome. Will the older members make the newcomer feel a part of the group, and if not can the novice "take it" and wait with patience for experience and for the opportunity to exert the Christian influence which was often referred to in the days of preparation?

Conflict of purpose and details - There is need on the mission field for the ability to sink oneself and one's normal self-concerns in one great and absorbing interest. In the minutiae of details with which the new missionary must be concerned sometimes the one great interest loses the right of way. Then come homesickness, distaste for practical duties, lack of sympathy with one's associates. Has the newcomer enough imagination to see through the trees the great and inspiring forest?

Deference to others - In a small mission station difficult person-

alities loom large and sometimes such trying individuals are those to whom deference must be paid. It is a menace to the mental health of the person with even slight neurotic tendencies to have to defer to persons who may seem over-rigid, old-fashioned in their theology, perhaps lacking in generosity and in sympathy with the young. Can the larger purpose make such deference easier?

Tendency to censoriousness - Partly an environmental partly a personal hazard arises from the fact that many missionaries are called upon to do a certain amount of individual counseling, both with the nationals among whom they are living and occasionally with fellow missionaries. In work so closely connected with and inspired by religious beliefs and loyalties it is often hard for the missionary to refrain from blame and reproof, from visible disapproval or from a shocked attitude toward situations or persons about whom his counseling has been asked. Censoriousness is something to be smothered completely the moment one finds it coming to the surface. "Judge not that thou be not judged" is one of the maxims of Christian behavior which we accept without too carefully considering their application to ordinary daily conduct. One must not only refrain from judging, if one is to be truly helpful as a counselor, but from the appearance of judging.

Conflict of primary and secondary purposes - It is difficult for many people to be honest with themselves. In asking oneself the question, why do I want to be a missionary, the answer most readily made is probably, "I want to help in spreading the Gospel","I want to make the most complete expression possible of my devotion to Christ and his teachings", and similar statements of discipleship. The real answer may be made up of these and an added desire for adventure, or the wish to be important, (everyone wishes and needs that experience), or as one missionary candidate put it very frankly, the desire to travel and see strange places. There is nothing to be ashamed of in such wishes, the hazard consists in the danger that the mission field to which the candidate is assigned may not gratify these secondary but insistent wishes, and again the would-be missionary may not be able to "take" the disappointment. Honesty with oneself would probably put any such disappointment in its proper place.

Personality Hazards

Besides the hazards mentioned above which exist partly because of unfortunate personal attitudes there are many other personality hazards. Many mistakes, sometimes tragic ones, have occurred in religious work of various types because the study of problems of personality has not been given the importance it deserves. People take courses in evangelizing others when they sorely need to learn how to control themselves. Among the possible hindrances in the field of personality to a successful life as a missionary are the following: over-dominance, self-pity, emotional instability - often shown most disastrously in sex relationships; intellectual rigidity - evidenced by prejudices of various kinds.

Over-dominance - Over a period of several years the writer gave a Personality Inventory* to about 77 missionary candidates and missionaries on furlough which was supposed to show, among other personality traits, the presence and amount of this trait of dominance. In studies of "Personal Counseling" it has been asserted that this trait is a hindrance to the best work in the counseling field, for when a counselor is consulted he does not advise or urge a definite course of action, but tries earnestly to find out the inquirer's interests and desires and build on these his efforts to be of assistance in the processes of decision and stabilization. The quality of dominance is more apt than not to interfere with the counselor's desire and ability to find out controlling tendencies in another. It leads rather to the desire to advise and instruct. Humility and patience, a quick sympathy and imagination, are more valuable characteristics. Sixteen of the 77 missionaries had scores far above normal. The highest score was above any mentioned test scores. The scores most to be desired, a middle ground between dominance and submission, were found in the case of 17 of those taking the test. This naturally proves nothing in general, but it does serve to point out individuals who may need help in this regard.

The warning to beware of the obvious must however be repeated here. For some people who are aggressive in their desire to influence others, to determine their actions for them, are so because of extreme feelings of inferiority on their own part. Nothing re-establishes one in his own esteem so quickly as to believe that he has been instrumental in solving another's problem for him. In such a case help for the over-dominant person must take the form of reassurance as to his own capabilities. Opportunity should be found for legitimate activities in the field of human relationships.

Self-pity should have a chapter by itself. Suffice it to say that the loneliness which often attacks the newcomer to a missionary outpost increases in relation to the ease with which a person allows pity for himself or herself to become overwhelming. The antidote is obvious - to shift the focus of interest from oneself to others, or to become absorbed in the compelling purpose of the missionary life. Often to overcome self-pity is extremely difficult; it depends upon the length of time during which the habit has persisted and how deep-seated it is. Those who choose the candidate should inquire as to its presence, for it well may poison many relationships and in that way lessen usefulness.

Emotional instability shows itself in many different ways and a high degree of this quality should be evidence of general unfitness for work on the mission field. Such instability can be discovered by careful study of candidates' early histories, their previous relationships with others and the quality of their religious life. One can become aware of it in himself only by consulting with someone qualified to give help in that sort of difficulty.

---

*The Bernreuter Personality Inventory, devised by Dr. Robert Benreuter, then of Stanford University, and standardized by himself and his students, has been widely used in many fields, especially vocational counseling. By its use the subjects are rated for six personality traits and their opposites on a scale of 100. The position on the scale indicates the amount of the trait in question possessed by the subject. Such inventories are never 100% accurate, but are a useful indication of the presence of important characteristics.

To be easily excited, too much stirred to hero-worship. too quickly depressed or exalted, too easily overcome by the griefs or misfortunes of others to be an objective listener, too uncertain of one's own philosophy, may be symptoms of such instability. Emotional instability can be overcome, but the process is pretty sure to be a long one and the environment of the mission field would not seem to be a favorable one for such personality change, It is impossible to give in so small a space rules for overcoming emotional instability. Talks with a skilled and understanding consultant, some overwhelming experience which has an integrating influence on character or a complete change of purpose in life may bring about a serenity and strength of character greater than that of people who never have had to struggle against such a handicap. Again it depends on the individual's make-up, his environment and previous experiences. Few general rules can be given.

Too great susceptibility to prejudiced attitudes may be connected with the inability to be objective. When one is truly objective he is not biased in his opinions, he is willing and able to listen attentively and does not easily censure those about him. He looks for causes and for reasons before he makes up his mind. Some people learn to be objective sooner than others. This faculty seems to be connected with emotional maturity. People grow up physically, emotionally, intellectually; but unfortunately growth is not always balanced. A person may graduate from college with good marks, may be well-developed physically, yet may never outgrow an adolescent attitude towards most life-situations. There are perennial adolescents; it is a question whether they should undertake work in the mission field.

Dr. George R. Wells, in one of his newspaper columns, has this to say about prejudice: "Prejudices can be eliminated from one's life, but one has always to do this for himself. Essentially the best way to do this is to trace the prejudice to its origin. To do this is not impossible nor is it the simplest task in the world. Some practice in self-analysis is required. There is no harm but only good in thinking about oneself as long as it is truly thinking. If, instead of thinking, one picturizes oneself or worries about oneself, harm is usually done.

"It takes time and much patience to uncover the beginnings of our attitudes. Therefore, it is necessary to be convinced that there is a beginning and a discoverable beginning. Above all, a very high degree of intellectual honesty is much more rare than financial honesty".

Lack of self-control and self-understanding is closely tied to the ability to understand and to counsel others helpfully. The missionary must often undertake to guide distressed persons through the problems which beset them. As already stated one difficulty in the way of succeeding as a counselor is the habit of censoriousness. That may come about because of various personality weaknesses on the part of the counselor and is a good example of the dim dividing line between self-understanding and the understanding of others. Personal counseling has been defined as follows by Dr. Carl Rogers: "Counseling is not just an interview conducted expertly. It is an analysis of the problem so that the counselee easily understands what it is and formulation of plans so that the counselee may choose one to overcome his problem". This is very different from acting in an advisory capacity, as one wishes his lawyer or physician or broker to do. Often the person in need of counseling does not know what is the matter with him, why he does not get along with other people or with himself, why he feels depressed or is unduly aggressive

and over-active. On the other hand, if he seeks advice and follows it without fully understanding the source of his difficulties he may become over-dependent, which is a misfortune in itself.

Some Principles of Sound Counseling

Comments on personal counseling may not be applicable in the case of the majority of missionary candidates. They may however fill a need for some experienced missionaries. The following might be called Rules for the Counselor to observe. They include attitudes to avoid and methods to cultivate and may suggest to the candidate possible ways of obtaining help for himself.

1. It is important that the counselor should be an emotionally mature person; that he be not prejudiced, be able to maintain a calm manner, not dominant and over-eager to be influential; that he be intellectually able to plan the interview and act consistently with it, not unduly sympathetic one day and too matter-of-fact the next.

2. Patience and humility are cardinal virtues for the counselor. He must be a good listener and this takes patience; refraining from advice and dominance takes humility and a good understanding of oneself.

3. Where the problem presents many difficulties the counselor should try to terminate each interview in such a way that a second may seem to follow naturally.

4. It is wise to get what knowledge is needed by indirect questioning if possible, rather than by direct questions which need a yes or no answer. Help the applicant to answer his own questions. Be willing to wait for an honest answer. Often it does not come at once because of resistance - conscious or unconscious - on the part of the applicant, confusion as to causes, inability to face reality or to be honest with himself.

5. It is important for the counselor to remember that the difficulty which appears at first is probably not the whole story, it may even be a dishonest statement for one or all of the reasons cited above. More often than not such dishonesty is unconscious. The counselor does not censure inaccuracies, he tries to bring about greater clarity of vision and a greater desire on the part of the applicant to understand the problem in its entirety.

6. Tact, friendliness and at the same time objectivity are needed in order to bring the applicant to the point of saying, "I see I made a mistake", or "I am on the wrong track", or "I'd better think it over and make a new plan". All those things and similar should be said by the applicant rather than by the consultant. This takes more time, and again patience, but such a course will bring about a more useful and durable solution than a superimposed plan or even the wisest direct advice.

7. The counselor should almost never interpolate his own personal experiences. Sometimes, after several conferences, they may prove to be helpful, but more often they will constitute an unfortunate interruption to the efforts of the distressed person to tell his own story accurately and fully. The counselor, it has been well said, should act as a mirror in which the applicant comes to see himself and his difficulties more and more clearly.

This requires much self-control on the part of the counselor with the aforesaid patience and humility.

8. It is well for the counselor to be constantly on the alert to discover desirable personality traits or definite abilities in the applicant. He can then point to assets as well as help the client to see his weaknesses more clearly. This will be an encouragement to effort and also will help the client to see where his best usefulness may lie.

Religious Faith and Mental Hygiene

It may seem to some readers that the most important influence of all has been omitted, namely the help that religion should give in all one's personal difficulties. Confession, repentance, prayer for strength to overcome failures, are accepted by all missionaries as the cure for spiritual defects and as comfort in personal failures. To say that something else must often come first in time is not to minimize the importance of a personal religion. But, unfortunately, religion has too often become a matter of phrases which have never been put to a severe test, such as many missionary experiences are sure to be. The candidate may not be ready for complete personal surrender of the kind which a sincere and deep religious experience demands. The ground may need to be cleared of stones and weeds before the seed can take root and show a more vigorous growth. Sharp emotional upsets may blind the vision and sap the strength so that human help is needed to point the way to a revival of faith, to give support in taking difficult steps. I once heard a poor old rounder in a Bowery Mission say, "I praise the Lord Jesus that he has kept me from drink for 24 hours". One felt more hope for his complete recovery than if he had exultantly said that he was redeemed and would sin no more. The flesh is too weak in many such instances to stand by itself for long; the sufferer must have a helping hand and physical support while taking the first tottering steps in a new path. The guides in that mission were wise men and did not hope for too much at first. This may seem an extreme illustration, but some emotional battles are as severe as the battle against intemperance and should be so recognized.

In an earlier paragraph I spoke of taking for granted the religious preparation of the missionary. Perhaps one should not take the quality of such preparation too much for granted. Bible study, history of missions, history of other cultures than our own, do not necessarily lead to the development of a sure and deep personal religion, a true evaluation and use of spiritual resources. How many religiously educated persons have a working relationship with "a Power outside themselves which makes for righteousness"? Can that be taught? Probably not. But it can be described and held up as a goal. Many of the difficulties pointed out in this paper would melt away if the sufferer really felt that the Everlasting Arms were beneath him, really believed that even in the shadow of death he could be comforted and sustained. Someone has said that Christian Science has profited from the neglected truths of Christianity. Health and happiness would undoubtedly be more often present, and anxiety, that destroyer of self-control, more easily conquered, if belief were stronger than doubt and if faith were a living thing. One can practise faith as tests come and are faced squarely. We can never be sure that such tests can be met successfully unless we meet them with complete honesty, that is, acknowledge their nature and humbly ask help in solving them. The study of theology does not necessarily bring about this sure and active faith; if it takes the place of a deep-seated desire for a working relationship with God it may hinder the possession of such a faith.

A religious belief which becomes one's working philosophy is developed through discussion of values and personal needs more often than through discussion of topics in Biblical study, such as Paul's Journeys, his Epistles, or Old Testament History. A question once asked of the writer referred to a woman who said she believed in taking all her worries to God, and then she went on worrying. In her case faith was not active, it was not helping her to solve the personal difficulties which were stumbling blocks in her religious life.

Much of the discussion here refers to difficulties in the way of a successful experience as a missionary. The history of missionary endeavor teaches us that there have been notable achievements in this field, and the lives of devoted and wise missionaries are presented to the candidate as examples of this success. These lives often exemplify the positive side of some of the hazards presented here. One of the maxims of mental hygiene is that to possess one major purpose and several minor purposes which are subordinated to the one great purpose is a measure of character. It has also been called a measure of true maturity. Where the major purpose is the extension of the Kingdom of God and all personal desires are colored by this great and absorbing purpose there is no time nor tendency to give way to weaknesses or inhibitions described above. Sometimes, as has been said, human help is needed in the effort to make this major purpose all-controlling. Such help can be found, and in that way personal hazards gradually overcome; when that is the case, environmental hazards have no longer power to distract one from the great purpose. Honesty with oneself, willingness to accept help, are prerequisites in the search for integration of character. Constancy of effort and the application of religious faith to all the problems in this demanding field of missionary endeavor should surely follow.

- - - - -

<u>A few books and pamphlets which may prove helpful</u>.

General:

Elliott, H.S. and G.L. - Solving Personal Problems
Kunkel, Fritz - Let's Be Normal
Plant, James S. - Personality and the Cultural Pattern
Strecker, E.A. and Appel, K.E. - Discovering Ourselves
Caner, G.C. - It's How you Take It
Terhune, W.B. - Connecticut Society for Mental Hygiene - pamphlets

Books emphasizing the value of a religious approach:

Showmaker, Samuel M. - How you Can Help Other People
Fosdick, H. Emerson - On Being a Real Person
Liebman, Joshua L. - Peace of Mind
Commission on Religion and Health, Federal Council of Churches -Pamphlets
Cabot, R.C. and Dicks, R.L. - The Art of Ministering to the Sick

Books of a more technical nature, but not difficult:

Menninger, Karl A. - The Human Mind (revised edition)
Horney, Karen - The Neurotic Personality of our Time
Horney, Karen - Our Inner Conflicts
Jung, Carl G. - Modern Man in Search of a Soul
Boisen, Anton T. - The Exploration of the Inner World

- - - - -

Copies of this paper may be obtained from the Secretary, Christian Medical Council for Overseas Work, 156 Fifth Ave., New York 10, N. Y.

Price - 5 cents